Pam.
Negroes

Mob Murder In America

The Challenge Which Lynching Brings to the Churches

"MOB violence is becoming a crowd habit. When life and property are ruthlessly taken, when men and women are lynched with no protection from officers or courts, law and order are trampled under foot. We call upon the pulpit, the press and all good people to create a public sentiment that will support necessary legislation for the enforcement of existing laws, that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness may be equally assured to all classes."

—*Statement of Federal Council of Churches, September* 4, 1919.

Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America

March, 1923

"We unhesitatingly declare lynching to be a crime against the honor of our nation. . . . We, therefore, recommend that in the pulpit, in the religious press and denominational literature, and in every other possible way, the Christian forces of the South unhesitatingly and uncompromisingly condemn and oppose all mob violence, and that the voice of our united Christian effort be steadfastly raised in the defense of the sacredness of life and of law and order."—*Southern Church Leaders' Conference, Blue Ridge, N. C., August,* 1920.

"We especially urge that everything possible be done to prevent lynchings. . . . This crime of crimes, which is not only a complete subversion of law, but a stroke at the very life of law itself, has discredited our nation in the eyes of other civilized nations and brought undying obloquy upon many of the states of the Union."—*Quadrennial Address, Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Hot Springs, Ark., May,* 1922.

"We are convinced that if there is any one crime more dangerous than another, it is 'that crime which strikes at the root of and undermines constituted authority, breaks all laws and restraints of civilization, substitutes mob violence and masked irresponsibility for established justice,' and deprives society of a sense of protection against barbarism.

"Therefore, we believe that 'no falser appeal can be made to southern manhood than that mob violence is necessary for the protection of womanhood,' or that the brutal practice of lynching and burning of human beings is an expression of chivalry. We believe that these methods are 'no protection to anything or anybody, but that they jeopardize every right and every security that we possess.'"—*Action of Women Members, Georgia State Committee on Race Cooperation.*

The Atrocious Character of the Evil

IT hardly seems credible that America, with its great Christian churches and its missionary enterprises, its homes, schools and courts, permitted between 1885 and 1922, 4,154 persons to be lynched by mobs. Of the total number lynched during this period, 1,034 were white and 3,120—i.e., 3 out of 4—were Negro victims. Doubtless many more of whom no record was made were similarly murdered. In 1919 there were 83 persons lynched; in 1920 there were 61; in 1921, 64, and in 1922 there were at least 57 lynched.

Some of those lynched by mobs were charged with crime; many of them were charged with misdemeanors only; some only with words or acts which are nowhere at any time punishable by law. All were slain without trial where they might have faced their accusers, had witnesses and had the evidence considered by a lawful judge or jury. The frenzied mob was judge, jury, and executioner.

In many cases persons not sought by the mobs have been lynched by mistake, so wild and savage has been the procedure. Some of the victims suffered indescribable torture, such as saturation of parts of the body with kerosene or gasoline so that they could be burned piecemeal, branding with hot irons, or the gouging out of eyes and ears with red-hot rods.

In some cases these atrocities have been perpetrated within sight of the churches of the community. Here is an extract from two newspaper descriptions of a Sunday morning incident near the public square of a * * * town not far from two churches:

"While bound to an iron post with logging chains, the Negro looked on in dumb wonder at the stern-visaged men who heated pokers and smoothing irons until they were as fiery as the flames that licked them hot . . . Children on the outskirts romped and played, their merry voices rising above the hushed hubbub of the mob. At last the irons were hot . . ."

"It was estimated that fully 7000 persons saw Scott burned to death. It was fully half an hour after the Negro had been chained to the post before he was burned with hot pokers. His eyes, face and body were burned with irons before the fire was lighted . . . ." Then rubbish was piled high about the agonized body, squirming beneath its load. More and more wood and rubbish were fed the fire, but at three o'clock Lation Scott was not dead . . . Life finally fled at four o'clock."

A newspaper description of another burning is as follows:

"The captors proceeded to a spot about a quarter of a mile from the railroad station and prepared the death fire. The crowd followed and remained throughout the horrible proceedings. The Negro was led to a hickory tree, to which they chained him.

"After securing him to the tree a fire was laid. A short distance away another fire was kindled, and into it was put an iron bar to heat. When the bar became red hot a member of the mob jabbed it to-

ward the Negro's body. Crazed with fright, the black grabbed hold of it, and as it was pulled through his hands the atmosphere was filled with the odor of burning flesh. This was the first time the murderer gave evidence of his will being broken. Scream after scream rent the air. As the hot iron was applied to various parts of his body his yelling and cries for mercy could be heard in the town."

Here is a newspaper description of still another scene:

"**Burn Negro to Death by Inches.**" (headline) . . . "With the Negro chained to a log, members of the mob placed a small pile of leaves around his feet. Gasoline was then poured on the leaves, and the carrying out of the death sentence was under way. Inch by inch the Negro was fairly cooked to death. Every few minutes fresh leaves were tossed on the funeral pyre until the blaze had passed the Negro's waist. As the flames were eating away his abdomen, a member of the mob stepped forward and saturated the body with gasoline. It was then only a few minutes until the Negro had been reduced to ashes."

Lynchings are often definitely planned and carried out. Here are a few illustrations chosen from accounts in leading city newspapers following lynchings:

1. "Late last night the jailer was enticed away from the prison on the pretense of a call to make an arrest. As soon as he was out of hearing a mob of 200 masked men went to the jail and took the keys from his wife; and, securing the three prisoners, took them to the Tennessee River bridge and placed a strong rope around the neck of each, tied the other end of the rope to the timbers of the bridge and compelled their victims to jump."

2. (Summarized.) "Masked mob entered the jail at two a. m. and took out nine prisoners—one white man and eight Negroes. Eight were shot to death, and one, a Negro, escaped death after being wounded. The mob overpowered the town marshal and the jailer, carried the men out and tied them to fence posts by their necks and then fired five volleys into their bodies. Only one of the prisoners had been convicted—a Negro, under sentence of death for the murder of another Negro."

3. "**3,000 Will Burn Negro.**" (headline) . . . "The lynching has now been fixed at five p. m. A Committee of Ellisville citizens has been appointed to make necessary arrangements for the event and the mob is pledged to act in conformity with these arrangements. . . . Three thousand strangers are in Ellisville today to witness the disposition of John Hartfield. . . . Officers are unable to control the crowds."

4. "**Avengers Set Six o'clock as Lynching Hour.**" (headline). "A party of seven in two automobiles with Henry Lowry, Negro murderer, . . . stopped here at 12:20 o'clock Wednesday afternoon, . . . to Richardson's landing where they will cross and be joined by a party waiting on the Arkansas side, prepared to lynch Lowry promptly at six o'clock." (Later Associated Press dispatches gave full account of the burning as planned).

Mob murderers have had no regard for womanhood and motherhood. During the years 1889-1921 eighty-three women, seventeen of them white women, were lynched. Several of these women were about to become mothers or had nursing infants. Some of them were put to death with savage tortures, such as burning and disemboweling. Such brutality might be expected in pagan times or heathen countries, but by no means in a civilized land today.

This is not all of the story. Mob law visits its terror not only upon the accused, but when a mob starts, (and that may be at any time in many communities) the life and person of any individual Negro or member of other hated groups may be sacrificed. Thus paralyzing fear for life and safety haunts the minds of millions of our neighbors and fellow citizens. They grow prematurely old under suffering from such fear.

The Extent of the Lynching Evil

The States free from this blot are few in number. There are only four—Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—where such an atrocity has not been recorded for any community in the Commonwealth. In four others—Connecticut, Maine, New Jersey, and Utah—there has been no recorded lynching since 1889. During the past ten years, so far as records show, the territory of ten additional states—Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, [redacted] Maryland, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wisconsin—has been free from the evil. It is true that much of the territory in the states where lynchings have occurred is free from this blot and that probably the majority of citizens in those states are opposed to the evil. The responsibility, however, rests primarily upon the states to protect the lives of all persons anywhere within their boundaries.

The record by years gives a startling picture of lawlessness. According to the figures in the Negro Year Book there was a slow decrease in the number of lynchings from the climax of 255 in 1892 and 200 in 1893 down to 63 in 1901. During 1903 and 1904 there was an increase; then a slow decrease until 1918, when an alarming tendency to increase again was manifested.

Of the 4,154 mob victims from 1885 to 1922 inclusive, the number of white victims has rapidly decreased, particularly since 1901, having been less than ten each year, except in two years, since 1903. Among the white victims were a German (during the War), Italians, Mexicans, and Jews, indicating that race prejudice was a prime factor. The number of Negro victims during the same period has fluctuated slowly downward but ranged between 50 and 100, except in 1902 when the number reported was 104, and in 1917 when the number reported was 38. There is evidence to indicate that during later years lynchings of Negroes have been concealed from the newspapers. Therefore no records of them were secured. The following diagram, based upon figures given in the Negro Year-book, 1921-22, shows graphically the trend of lynching each year from 1885 to 1922:

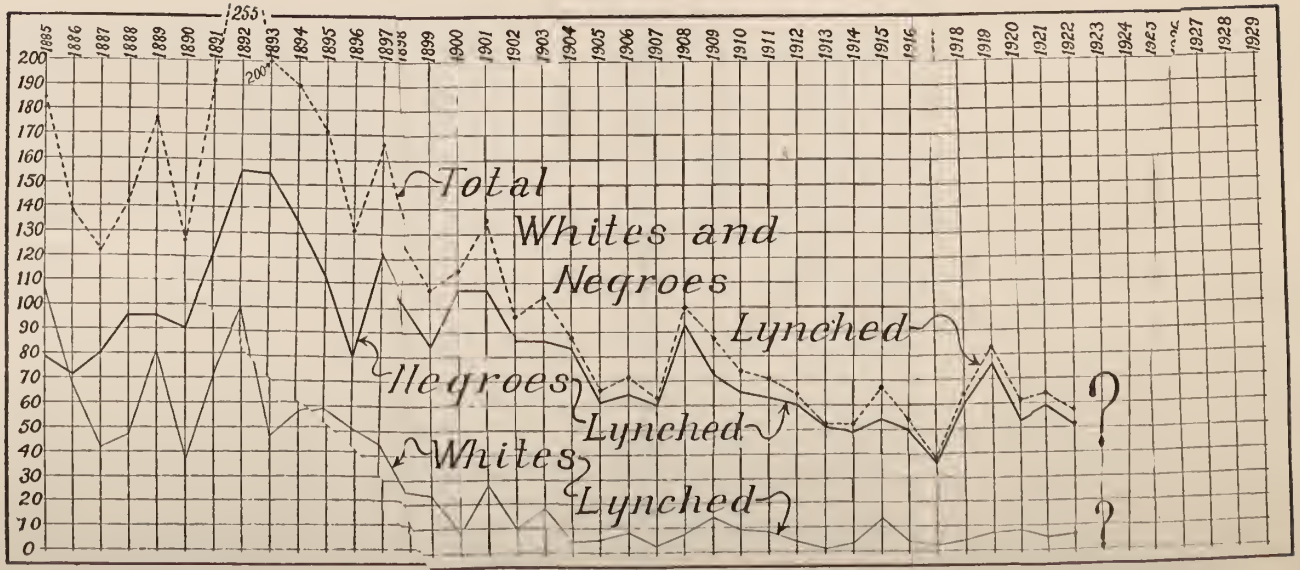

Diagram Showing White, Negro, and Total Number of Victims Lynched by Years, 1885 to 1922.

(Based upon figures in "Negro Year Book" 1921-1922 pp 355-356)

Alleged Crimes of the Victims

Rape is usually alleged as the principal cause of lynchings. Certainly such a crime could not be attributed to the 83 women victims! **As a matter of fact, nearly four-fifths of all the lynchings in thirty-seven years have been for alleged crimes other than rape or for alleged acts that are not crimes or misdemeanors under any law, common or statute.**

Out of 4,097 victims only 829—60 whites and 769 Negroes—were lynched on the charge of rape or attempted rape. **This is only 20.2 percent of the total.** And it should be remembered that these men had been accused, not convicted, of the crime.

In this connection it may be noted that the Census records of 1904 for prison commitments for rape per 100,000 of the total population show that Negroes had a lower rate for this crime than Italian, Mexican, Austrian, Hungarian, French, or Russian elements of the population.* If all Negroes who were accused of rape for that year and lynched without trial were added to the number committed to prison for that crime, the percentage would still probably be lower than that of all these nationalities, except the French and the Russian.**

Again, in 1911 the convictions for rape in New York City Court of General Sessions, in comparison with those for other crimes, shows Negroes 0.5 per cent; native whites 0.3 per cent; and foreign whites, 1.8 per cent. The same year, the Chicago police arrests for rape, in comparison with arrests for other crimes, showed Negroes 0.34 per cent; native whites 0.30 per cent; foreign whites, 0.35 per cent.†

More than one-third of the victims lynched since 1889 were accused of homicide or felonious assault. It should be borne in mind that in all other civilized countries persons so accused are duly tried in a court of law and when proven guilty are punished. Only in the United States are they likely to be hurried into eternity by lynchers without opportunity to face their accusers in a court of law. About one-twelfth were accused of crime against property; some were alleged to have "insulted" white persons; and more than 145 were not recorded as accused of any crime whatsoever.††

"Mob law" undermines the very foundations of government, law, and order. The future of our American system of government is involved.

Two typical illustrations of many incidents are:

1. "In the court-room, sentence had been passed on Reed and Cato, and the judge had just congratulated the people on 'their splendid regard for the law under very trying conditions.' Then the mob broke in. A brother of the murdered Hodges, a minister from Texas, rose magnificently to the occasion. With tears streaming down his face, he begged the mob to let the law take its course.

*Negro Year Book, 1921-22; p. 72, 353.
**Haynes G. E., THE TREND OF THE RACES, p 38; Negro Year Book. p. 353.
†Negro Year Book, 1921-22; p. 72, 343.
††Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States. 1889-1918, Pamphlet published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, pp, 36-37,

" 'We don't want religion, we want blood,' yelled a voice. . . . The leaders plunged down the court-room and into the witness chamber where the Negroes sat with their wives, Reed's wife with a young baby. The officers of the law accommodatingly indicated the right Negroes, and the mob dragged them out."

2. "A message from ..... to 'The Journal and Tribune' says that Ed Johnson, the Negro convicted of rape, in whose case the U. S. Supreme Court granted an appeal today, was lynched at eleven o'clock tonight. A determined mob battered down the jail doors, and after a show of resistance was made, took Johnson out and lynched him."

Ours is now the only civilized country where human beings are publicly burned at the stake. We are a government of law. If the law is broken down and no longer has the respect and observance of the communities in the safeguarding of life and liberty, then nothing else is safe. There is no condition of society anywhere which justifies or excuses the mob's trampling of human rights under foot. Either America must make the life and property of every citizen and resident secure, no matter how humble or black, or else no citizen is safe.

Measures to Prevent Lynchings

Growing out of past years of experience those who have dealt with this evil recommend that:

1. **States that do not have special laws against lynching should enact them.** Six states have such laws now. The Kentucky law passed in 1920 provides that the penalty for lynching shall be death or life imprisonment and that penalty for attempted lynching shall be confinement in the penitentiary for not less than two years nor more than twenty-five years. The North Carolina law permits the judge of the Court issuing the indictment to transfer trial of the case to another court without preliminary appearance of the defendant before him; this allows the accused to be taken into another county for safe-keeping and to be tried there without danger of being mobbed. The Minnesota law and the Ohio law have drastic penalties for lynchers and measures to prevent lynchings. The South Carolina law gives parties injured either in person or property as a result of any riot or mob right to sue in the courts for damages against the county in which the injury takes place. In 1920 a widow of a Negro who was lynched in Laurens County was awarded a verdict of $2,000 damages by a court.

Leading newspapers have pointed out that if the states allow lynching and mob outlawry to continue, the Federal law will ultimately be invoked. A measure known as the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill passed the U. S. House of Representatives in 1922; was introduced into the Senate; was killed by a filibuster, and aroused a Nation-wide discussion of the lynching evil.

2. **Efforts to secure court trials and convictions of participants in mobs** should be undertaken in every state or locality where they occur. To this end it is suggested that the State authorities be given power

by law, if they do not already have it, to shift judges and prosecuting attorneys and to make change of venue for trials easier.

3. In states where he does not already possess it, **the governor should be given power to remove a sheriff who is proven derelict in his duty.** In South Carolina, Kentucky, and Florida the governor has this power. In Alabama the law provides that the sheriff be tried by the State Supreme Court. With such power and the growth of public opinion to support them governors can act effectively.

4. **A mounted police force may be provided by the state.** The state police have been effective in preventing lynchings in Tennessee. A law creating such a constabulary was enacted in 1919.

5. **Public spirited citizens should back up sheriffs and prosecutors who perform their duties** against mobs and should take action against those who fail in their duties. About eight hundred citizens of one Georgia County signed up to help the sheriff protect a prisoner, if necessary. When this was known no mob formed. In 1922 high-minded citizens of the Georgia Committee on Race Relations led the efforts which resulted in twenty-two indictments, including one deputy sheriff, following lynchings in eight instances. Four of twenty-two persons indicted have already been convicted and sentenced to the penitentiary. The significance of this is shown in the fact that during 37 years preceding there has been 430 lynchings in that state and only one indictment for unlawful assemblage.

6. **Public opinion** is the great lever that moves the officers and instruments of the law. **The public press** is the greatest factor in moulding this opinion. Whatever action is taken to keep the editorial columns and news columns turned against this great evil will prevent its further spread and make for its abolition.

What the Churches Can Do

Mob murder mocks Christian ideals. The mobbing and lynching of men and women is a savage practice and will render our Christian profession hypocritical. It flouts the very foundation principle of human brotherhood for which the Christian church stands. The red record of mob murder is a heart-rending alarm to the churches and a crucial challenge to them to determine whether Christianity or savagery shall rule in our communities.

We can never hope that the Gospel will come with its true power to the colored races of Asia and Africa so long as the very land which sends the missionaries does not itself assure humane and Christian treatment for all its citizens. Indeed the lynching evil, as missionaries and travelers have often told us, has long been held up as a reproach against Christian America in such lands as India, China, and Japan, where no such record prevails.

Rabindranath Tagore, in reply to an American's question as to what he thought of America's missionary enterprise in India, pointed to a newspaper clip-

ping which reported the burning alive of two Negroes in America, and said, "So long as this goes on in your own land, do you think you have any Christianity to export?"

There are things which church members as individuals, inspired by the Christian conception of life, can and should do, which the Church in its organized capacity may not be able to do. The following are suggestions of some ways in which Christian citizens may help to abolish the lynching evil and to secure Christian relations between the races:

1. **As voters, they can help directly to secure adequate legislation against lynching.** Legislators generally act in about the way they think expresses the real wishes of their constituencies.

2. **In order to make it possible for lynchers to be prosecuted properly they may contribute to funds for legal aid of competent legal counsel to secure and present the necessary evidence.** The Commission on Interracial Cooperation, with headquarters at the Palmer Building, Atlanta, Ga., is one of the agencies in a position to receive and make effective use of such contributions.

3. **They can help to create a better public opinion by influencing local newspapers to take a fair and just attitude on racial questions.** In other ways they can join with others in creating a public opinion which will bring participants in mobs to trial.

There are other things which the churches in their organized capacity can and should do to hasten the abolition of the lynching evil. The following are a few suggestions:

1. **The supreme contribution of the church will always be in effectively holding up the Christian ideal of relations between the races.** Unless men can be persuaded that the way of mutual respect, friendly cooperation, and positive goodwill—the Christian way —will really work, we shall not make much progress in removing the stain of lynching from our civilization. The pulpits of the Churches have the ears of millions, and can, if they will, stir the conscience of their congregations against the savage practice of lynching.

2. **The churches can impress the dangers of lynching atrocities and their awful effects upon the people,** the communities, and the Nation by a distribution of literature on these evils. Such facts as this pamphlet has described are not known to the great rank and file of church members.

3. **A series of educational talks or lectures on Negro progress and the better side of race relations can be provided.** Pamphlet literature on these subjects is being prepared by the Commission on the Church and Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Atlanta, Ga., and can be had upon request.

4. Conferences and meetings of church leaders may be held for recommending measures to prevent lynchings and for formulating plans to secure the cooperation of all the moral forces of the community or commonwealth.

5. **As a practical way of helping church members of the two races to understand and appreciate each other better, Race Relations Sunday may be observed.** The second Sunday in February is recommended by the Federal Council of the Churches. It affords a special opportunity when consciences may be stirred against lynching and when an interchange of visitors and of speakers between the churches of the two races may be made in a way that will replace prejudice and hatred with mutual understanding, goodwill and co-operation.

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